A SERMON

Lately Preached

ON

1 CORINTH 3. 15.

BY

A Reverend Divine of the Church of

ENGLAND.

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1 Cor. 3. 15.

But he himself shall be Saved, yet so as by Fire.

THE Context runs thus. *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise Master-builder, I have laid the Foundation, and another buildeth thereon: But let every man take heed how he Buildeth thereupon. For other Foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. Now if any man Build upon this Foundation, Gold, Silver, Precious Stones, Wood, Hay, Stubble, Every mans work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; But it shall be revealed by Fire, and the Fire shall try every mans work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath Built thereupon, he shall receive a Reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; BUT HE HIMSELF SHAL BE SAVED, YET SO AS BY FIRE.*

IN these Words the Apostle speaks of a sort of Persons, who held indeed the Foundation of *Christianity*, but Built upon it such *Doctrines* or *Practices* as would not bear the *trial*; which

he expreſſeth to us by *Wood*, *Hay*, and *Stubble*, which are not *proof* againſt the *Fire*. Such a perſon, the Apoſtle tells us, hath brought himſelf into a very dangerous ſtate, though he would not abſolutely deny the *poſſibility* of his *Salvation*; *He himſelf ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by Fire.*

That by *Fire* here, is not meant the Fire of *Purgatory*, as ſome pretend (who would be glad of any ſhadow of a Text of Scripture, to countenance their own dreams) I ſhall neither trouble you nor my ſelf to manifeſt.

It is very well known, that this is a Proverbial phraſe, uſed not only in Scripture, but in prophane Authors, to ſignifie *a narrow eſcape out of a great danger*. He ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by Fire, διὰ πυρὸς, *out of the Fire*. Juſt as δι ὕδατος is uſed, 1 *Pet.* 3. 20. where the Apoſtle ſpeaking of the eight perſons of *Noah*'s family, who eſcap'd the Flood, διεσώθησαν δι ὕδατος, they eſcaped *out of the Water*. So here this phraſe is to be rendred in the Text, *He himſelf ſhall eſcape, yet ſo as out of the Fire*. The like expreſſion you have, *Amos* 4. 11. *I have pluckt them as a Firebrand out of the Fire*. And *Jude* 23. *Others Save with fear, plucking them out of the Fire*. All which expreſſions ſignifie the greatneſs of the danger, and the difficulty of eſcaping it. And ſo the *Roman* Orator * (who, it is likely did not think of *Purgatory*,) uſeth this phraſe; *Quo ex judicio, velut*

* *Tully.*

velut ex incendio, nudus effugit; From which Judgement or Sentence he escaped naked, as it were out of a burning. And one of the *Greek* Orators * tells us, That *to save a man out of the Fire, was a common proverbial speech.* And thus St. *Chrysostom* interprets this very place, He shall escape as one that escapes out of the Fire, that is, (saith he) *as one who when his house at midnight is set on Fire, wakes and leaps out of his Bed, and runs naked out of the doors, taking nothing that is within along with him, but imploying his whole care to Save his body from the flames.*

* *Aristides*

From the Words thus explained, the Observation that naturally ariseth is this. *That men may hold all the Fundamentals of Christian Religion, and yet may superadd other things whereby they may greatly endanger their Salvation.* What those things were, which some among the *Corinthians* Built upon the Foundation of Christianity, whereby they endanger'd their Salvation, we may probably conjecture, by what the Apostle reproves in this Epistle as the tolerating of *Incestious Marriages*, communicating in *Idol Feasts*, &c. And especially by the Doctrine of the false Apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian Churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this Epistle. And what their *Doctrine* was, we have an account *Acts* 15. *viz.*

that they impoſe upon the *Gentile* Chriſtians, *Circumciſion*, and *the Obſervation of the* Jewiſh *Law*, teaching that *unleſs they were Circumciſed and kept the Law of* Moſes, *they could not be ſaved.* So that they did not only Build theſe Doctrines upon *Chriſtianity*, but they made them equal with the *Foundation*, ſaying, That *unleſs men believed and practiſed ſuch things, they could not be Saved.*

I ſhall at this time take occaſion from this paſſage of the Apoſtles to conſider theſe two things.

1. Some *Doctrines* and *Practices*, which have been built upon the *Foundation* of *Chriſtianity* to the great hazard and danger of mens *Salvation*; And to be plain, I mean particularly, by the Church of *Rome.*

2. Whether our granting a *poſſibility* of Salvation (though with great hazard) to thoſe in the communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a reaſonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himſelf to that Church?

And there is the more reaſon to conſider theſe things, when ſo many *ſeducing Spirits* are ſo active and buſie to pervert men from the *Truth*; and when we ſee every day ſo many *Perſons* and their *Religion* ſo eaſily parted. For this reaſon theſe two Conſiderations ſhall be the ſubject of the following Diſcourſe.

I. Firſt,

I. First, We will consider some *Doctrines* and *Practices* which the Church of *Rome* hath built upon the *Foundation* of *Christianity*, to the great hazard and danger of mens *Salvation*. It is not denied by the most judicious *Protestant* but that the Church of *Rome* do hold all the Articles of the Christian Faith which are necessary to Salvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our Separation from them, is, *the imposing of new Doctrines and Practices upon Christians, as necessary to Salvation*, which were never taught by our Saviour, or his Apostles; and which are either directly contrary to the Doctrine of Christianity, or too apparently destructive of a good Life. And I begin,

1. With their *Doctrines*. And, because I have no mind to aggravate lesser matters, I will single out four or five points of Doctrine, which they have added to the Christian Religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, nor own'd in the first ages of Christianity. And the

First which I shall mention, and which being once admitted, makes way for as many Errors as they please to bring in, is this their *Doctrine of Infallibility*. *And* this they are very stiff

and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themſelves, where this *Infallibility* is ſeated; whether in *the Pope alone*, or *a Council alone*, or *in both together*, or in *the diffuſive body of Chriſtians*; But they are ſure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice againſt it? can any man think, that this *priviledge* was at firſt conferred upon the Church of *Rome*, and that Chriſtians in all Ages did believe it, and had conſtant recourſe to it, for the determining of differences, and yet that that very Church, which hath enjoyed and uſed it ſo long, ſhould now be at a loſs where to find it? Nothing could fall out more unluckily, than that there ſhould be ſuch differences among them about that which they pretend to be the only Means of ending all differences.

There is not the leaſt intimation in Scripture of this *priviledge* conferr'd upon the *Roman* Church; nor do the Apoſtles, in all their Epiſtles, ever ſo much as give the leaſt direction to Chriſtians to appeal to the Biſhop of *Rome* for a determination of many differences, which even in thoſe times, happen'd among them. And it is ſtrange they ſhould be ſo ſilent in this matter, when there were ſo many *occaſions* to ſpeak of it; if our Saviour had plainly appointed ſuch an *infallible Judge* of Controverſies, for this very end, to decide the differences that

ſhould

ſhould happen among Chriſtians. It is ſtrange that the *Ancient Fathers*, in their diſputes with Hereticks, ſhould never appeal to this *Judge*; Nay it is ſtrange they ſhould not conſtantly do it, in all caſes, it being ſo ſhort and expedite a way for the ending of Controverſies. And this very conſideration, to a wiſe man, is inſtead of a thouſand arguments to ſatisfie him that in thoſe times no ſuch thing was believed in the whole world.

Now this *Doctrine of Infallibility*, if it be not true, is of ſo much the more pernicious conſequence to Chriſtianity, becauſe the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it, in all their other errors; and gives them a pretence of aſſuming an Authority to themſelves to impoſe their own fancies and miſtakes upon the whole Chriſtian world.

2. Their *Doctrine* about *Repentance*. Which conſiſts in confeſſing their Sins to the Prieſt; which if it be but accompanied with any degree of *Contrition*, does, upon *Abſolution* received from the Prieſt, put them into a ſtate of *Salvation*, though they have lived the moſt lewd and debauched lives that can be imagin'd; than which nothing can be more deſtructive of a good life. For if this be true, all the hazard that the moſt wicked man runs of his Salvation is only the danger of ſo *ſudden a death*, as

gives

gives him no ſpace for Confeſſion and Abſolution. A caſe that happens ſo rarely, that any man that is ſtrongly addicted to his Luſts, will be content to venture his Salvation upon this hazard; and all the Arguments to a good Life will be very inſignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when Remiſſion of Sins may be had upon ſuch cheap tearms.

3. The *Doctrine of Purgatory*. By which they mean a ſtate of Temporary Puniſhments after this Life, from which men may be releaſed and Tranſlated into Heaven, by the Prayers of the Living and the Sacrifice of the *Maſs*. That this Doctrine was not known in the Primitive Church, nor can be proved from Scripture, we have the free acknowledgement of as Learned and Eminent men as any of that Church; which is to acknowledge that it is a Superſtructure upon the Chriſtian Religion. And though in one ſenſe, it be indeed a building of *Gold* and *Silver* upon the Foundation of Chriſtianity, conſidering the vaſt Revenues which this Doctrine (and that of *Indulgences*, which depends upon it) brings into that Church; yet I doubt not, but in the Apoſtles ſenſe, it will be found to be *Hay* and *Stubble*. But how groundleſs ſoever it be, it is too gainful a Doctrine to be eaſily parted withal.

4. The

4. The *Doctrine* of *Transubstantiation.* A hard word, but I would to God that were the worst of it; the thing is much more difficult. I have taken some pains to consider other Religions that have been in the World, and I must freely declare, that I never yet, in any of them, met with any Article or Proposition, imposed upon the belief of men, half so unreasonable and hard to be believed as this is. And yet this, in the *Romish* Church, is esteemed one of the most principal Articles of the Christian Faith: though there is no certain Foundation for it in Scripture, then for our Saviours being Substantially changed into all those things which are said of him, as that he is a Rock, a Vine, a Door, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This Doctrine hath not only *no certain Foundation* in Scripture, but I have a far heavier charge against it, namely, that it undermines the very Foundation of Christianity it self. And surely nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the *Christian Doctrine*, which destroys the *reason* of our belief of the whole. And that this Doctrine does so, will appear evidently, if we consider what was the main Argument which the Apostles used to convince the World of the *truth of Christianity.* And that was this; *That our Blessed Saviour, the Author of this Doctrine,*

wrought

wrought such & such Miracles, and particularly that he rose again from the Dead; And this they proved, because they were eye-witnesses of his Miracles, and had seen him, and conversed with him after he was risen from the Dead. But what if their senses did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied, but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! We will now suppose (as the Church of *Rome* does) *Transubstantiation* to have been one part of the Christian Doctrine, which the Apostles Preached. But if this Doctrine be true, then all mens Senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein 'tis as hard for them to be deceived, as in any thing in the world; For two things can hardly be imagin'd more different, than a *little bit* of Wafer, and the whole *Body* of a Man.

So that the Apostles perswading men to believe this Doctrine, perswaded them not to trust their Senses, and yet the Argument which they used to perswade them to this was built upon the direct contrary principle, that *mens Senses are not to be trusted*; For if they be not, then notwithstanding all the evidence the Apostles offer'd for the Resurrection of our Saviour, he might not be risen; and so

ſo the Faith of Chriſtians was vain. So they that repreſent the Apoſtles as abſurdly as is poſſible, *viz.* going about to perſwade men out of their Senſes, by vertue of an Argument, the whole ſtrength whereof depends upon the certainty of Senſe.

And now the matter is brought to a fair iſſue. If the teſtimony of *Senſe* be to be relied upon, then *Tranſubſtantiation* is falſe: If it be not, then no man is ſure that Chriſtianity is true. For the utmoſt aſſurance that the Apoſtles had of the truth of Chriſtianity, was the teſtimony of their own Senſes concerning our Saviours Miracles; and this Teſtimony every man hath againſt *Tranſubſtantiation*. From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no not the Apoſtles themſelves) had more reaſon to believe *Chriſtianity* to be true, than every man hath to believe *Tranſubſtantiation* to be falſe. And we who did not ſee our Saviours Miracles (as the Apoſtles did) and have only a credible Relation of them, but do ſee the *Sacrament*, have leſs evidence of the *truth* of *Chriſtianity* then of the *falſhood* of *Tranſubſtantiation*.

But cannot God impoſe upon the Senſes of men, and repreſent things to them otherwiſe than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he hath done this, are we not to believe him? Moſt certainly. But then we ought to be aſſured that he hath made ſuch a Revelation;

Revelation; which *Assurance* no man can have, the certainty of Sense being taken away.

I shall press the business a little farther. Supposing the *Scripture* to be a *Divine Revelation*, and that these words [*This is my Body*] if they be in Scripture, must necessarily be taken in the strict and literal sense. I ask now, What greater evidence any man has, that these words [*This is my Body*] are in the Bible, than every man has that the Bread is not chang'd in the Sacrament? Nay no man has so much; for we have only the evidence of *one* Sense that these words are in the Bible, but that the Bread is not chang'd we have the concurring Testimony of *several* of our senses. In a word, if this be once admitted, that the *Senses* of all men are deceiv'd in one of the most plain sensible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a *Divine Revelation* to Men; nor is there any way to confute the grossest imposture in the World: For if the clear evidence of all mens Senses be not sufficient for this purpose, let any man if he can find a better and more convincing Argument.

5. I will give but one Instance more of their Doctrines. And that shall be, their *Doctrine* of *deposing Kings* in case of Heresie, and Absolving their Subjects from their Allegiance

giance to them. And this is not a meer *Speculative Doctrine*, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Bishops of *Rome*, as every one knows that is vers'd in History. For the Troubles and Confusions which were occasion'd by this very thing make a good part of the History of several Ages.

I hope no body expects that I should take the pains to shew, that this was not the Doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles, nor of the Primitive Christians. The *Papists* are many of them so far from pretending to this, that in some times and places, when it is not seasonable and for their purpose, we have much a-doe to perswade them that ever it was their Doctrine. But if *Transubstantiation* be their Doctrine, *this* is; for they came both out of the same Forge, I mean the Council of *Lateran* under Pope *Innocent* the Third. And if (as they tell us) *Transubstantiation* was then establish'd, so was *this*. And indeed one would think they were Twins, and brought forth at the same time, they are so like one another, that is, both so monstrously unreasonable.

II. I come now in the *Second* place, to consider some *Practices* of the Church of *Rome*, which I am afraid, will prove as bad

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as her *Doctrines*. I shall instance in these Five.

1. Their celebrating of their Divine Service *in an Unknown Tongue*. And that not only contrary to the practice of the Primitive Church, and to the great end and design of Religious Worship, which is the Edification of those who are concerned in it, (and it is hard to imagine how men can be Edified by what they do not understand) but likewise in direct contradiction to St. *Paul*, who hath no less than a whole Chapter, wherein he confutes this Practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly, as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this Practice was not condemned by St. *Paul*, or that it was allowed and used in the first Ages of Christianity, need not be ashamed to set up for the defence of any Paradox in the world.

2. The Communion *in one kind*. And that notwithstanding that even, by their own acknowledgement, our Saviour instituted it in Both kinds, and the Primitive Church administred it in both kinds. This I must acknowledge is *no addition* to Christianity, but *a Sacrilegious taking away* of an Essential part of the Sacrament. For the *Cup* is as Essential a part

part of the Institution as the *Bread*; and they might as well, and by the same Authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their Worshipping of *Images*. Which practice (notwithstanding all their distinctions about it; which are no other but what the *Heathens* used in the same case) flyes as full in the face of the *Second Commandment*, as a *deliberate* and *malicious killing* of a man is against the *Sixth*. But if the Case be so plain, a man would think that at least the Teachers and Guides of that Church should be sensible of it. Why, they are so, and afraid the people should be so too; And therefore in their ordinary *Catechisms* and *Manuals* of Devotion, they leave out the *Second Commandment*, and divide the *Tenth* into two to make up the number, lest if the common people should know it, their Consciences should start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain Command of God.

4. The worshipping of the *Bread* and *Wine* in the Eucharist, out of a false and groundless perswasion, *that they are substantially changed, into the Body and Bloud of Christ*. Which if it be not true, (and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole world) then, by the confession of several of their own learned Writers, they are guilty of gross *Idolatry*.

5. The Worſhip and invocation of *Saints* and *Angels*; and particularly of the Virgin *Mary*, which hath now for ſome Ages been a principal part of their Religion. Now a man may juſtly wonder that ſo conſiderable a part of Religion, as they make this to be, ſhould have no manner of foundation in the Scripture. Does our Saviour any where ſpeak one word concerning the worſhipping of Her? Nay, does he not take all occaſions to reſtrain all extravagant apprehenſions and imaginations concerning the Honour due to Her, as foreſeeing the degeneracy of the Church in this thing? When he was told that his Mother and Brethren were without: *Who* (ſays he) *are my Mother and my Brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the ſame is my Mother, and Siſter, and Brother.* And when the Woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the bleſſed Mother of our Lord; *Bleſſed is the Womb that bear thee, and the Paps that gave thee ſuck!* Our Saviour diverts it to another thing; *Yea rather, bleſſed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apoſtles in all their Precepts and directions concerning Prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to addreſs our ſelves to God, give the leaſt intimation of Prayer to the Virgin *Mary*, or making uſe of her Mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the *Pra-*

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Rite of the Church from the beginning, our *Saviour* and his Apoſtles would have been ſo ſilent about ſo conſiderable a part of Religion? Inſomuch that in all the Epiſtles of the Apoſtles I do not remember that her name is ſo much as once mentioned; And yet the worſhip of her in the Church of *Rome* is a main part of their Publick Worſhip; yea and of their Private Devotion too, in which it is uſual with them to ſay *ten Ave Maries* for *one Pater Noſter*, that is, for one Prayer they make to Almighty God they make ten addreſſes to the bleſſed Virgin, for that is the proportion obſerved in their Roſaries. He that conſiders *this* and had never ſeen the *Bible*, would have been apt to think, that there had been more ſaid concerning *Her* in Scripture, than either concerning *God*, or our Bleſſed *Saviour*; and that the New-Teſtament were full from one end to the other of Precepts and Exhortations to the worſhipping of her; and yet when all is done, I challeng any man to ſhew me, ſo much as one ſentence in the whole Bible that ſounds that way. And there is as little in the Chriſtian Writers of the firſt three hundred years. The truth is, *this practice* began to creep in among ſome Superſtitious people about the middle of the *fourth Century*; And I remember particularly, that *Epiphanius* who lived about that time, calls it, the *Hereſie of Women*.

And thus I have given you some Instances of several *Doctrines* and *Practices*, which the Church of *Rome* have built upon the Foundation of *Christianity*. Much more might have been said of them; but from what hath been said, any man may easily discern how dangerous they are to the Salvation of men.

I proceed now in the Second place.

II. To consider whether our granting *a possibility of Salvation*, though with great hazard, to those in the communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a sufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our Church and go to theirs. And there is the more need to consider this, because this is the great *popular Argument*, wherewith the Emissaries and Agents of that Church are wont to assault our people. *Your Church* (sayes they) *grants that a Papist may be Saved; Ours deny that a Protestant can be Saved: therefore it is safest to be of our Church, in which Salvation, by the acknowledgment of both sides, is possible.*

For answer to this, I shall endeavour to shew that this is so far from being *a good Argument*, that it is so intolerable *weak* and *sophistical*, that any considerate man ought to be ashamed to be catch'd by it. For either it is good of it self, and sufficient to perswade a man to relinquish our Church, and to pass over to theirs, without entering into the Merits of the Cause on either side, and without comparing the Doctrines

ctrines and Practices of both the Churches together, or it is not. If it be not sufficient *of it self* to perswade a man to leave our Church, without Comparing the Doctrines on both sides, then it is to no purpose, and there is nothing got by it. For if upon examination and comparing of Doctrines, the one appear to be *true*, and the other *false*, this alone, is sufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that Church where the true Doctrine is found, and then there is no need of this Argument.

If it be said, that this Argument is good in it self, without the examination of the Doctrines of both Churches; this seems a very strange thing for any man to affirm, that it is reason enough to a man to be of any Church, what ever her doctrines and Practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, & if the Church that differs from her do but allow *a possibility of Salvation* in her Communion.

But they who use this Argument, pretend that it is Sufficient of it self; and therefore I shall apply my self to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable *weakness* and *insufficiency* of it, to satisfie any mans Conscience or prudence to change his Religion. And to this end I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the *Principle* upon which this Argument relies.

2. Give some *parallel Instances* by which it will clearly appear that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon *those* to whom it is propounded. And

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

1. I shall shew the *weakness* of the *Principle* upon which this Argument relies. And that is this: *That whatever different Parties in Religion agree in is safest to be chosen.* The true consequence of which Principle, if it be driven to the head, is to perswade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the Principles of *Natural Religion*, for in these all Religions do agree. For if this Principle be true, and signifie any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the several parties in Religion differ; because that only is Safe and prudent to be chosen wherein *all* agree. So that this argument, if the Foundation of it be good, will perswade further than those who make use of it desire it should do: for it will not only make men forsake the *Protestant Religion*, but *Popery* too, and, which is much more considerable, *Christianity* it self.

2. I will give some *parallel Instances*, by which it will clearly be seen that this Argument concludes false. The *Donatists* denied the Baptism of the Catholicks to be good, but the *Catholicks* acknowledged the Baptism of the *Donatists* to be valid. So that both sides

were

were agreed that the Baptism of the *Donatists* was good; therefore the safest way for St. *Austin* and other *Catholicks* (according to this Argument) was to be baptized again by the *Donatists*, because by the acknowledgment of both sides Baptism among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the Church of *Rome*. Several in that Church hold *the personal Infallibility of the Pope, and the lawfulness of deposing and killing Kings for Heresie*, to be *de fide*, that is, necessary Articles of Faith, and consequenly that whoever does not believe them, cannot be saved. But a great many Papists, though they believe these things to be no matters of faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now according to this Argument, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points, because both sides are agreed, that *they that hold them may be saved*; but one side positively sayes, that *men cannot be saved if they do not hold them.*

But my Text furnisheth me with as good an Instance to this purpose as can be desired. St. *Paul* here in the Text, acknowledgeth the *possibility* of the *Salvation* of those, *who built Hay and Stubble upon the foundation of Christianity; that they might be Saved*, though with great difficuly, and as it were, *out of the Fire*. But now among those Builders with Hay and Stubble, there were those who denied the

possibility of St. *Paul*'s Salvation, and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who Built the *Jewish* Ceremonies and Observances upon the Foundation of Christianity, and said, that unless men were Circumcised and kept the law of *Moses*, they could not be Saved. So that by this Argument St. *Paul* and his followers ought to have gone over to those *Judaizing Christians*, because it was acknowledged on both sides, that they might be Saved: But these *Judaizing Christians* were as uncharitable to St. *Paul* and other Christians, as the Church of *Rome* is now to us; for they said positively that they could not be Saved. But can any man think, that St. *Paul* would have been moved by this Argument, to leave a safe and certain way of Salvation, for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The Argument, you see is the very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way; which plainly shews, that it is a *contingent Argument*, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

3. I shall take notice of some *gross Absurdities* that follow from it. I shall mention but these two.

1. According to this Principle, it is always safest to be on the *uncharitable side*. And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian or a true Church, as a man

man would wish. *Charity* is one of the most Essential marks of Christianity, and what the Apostle saith of particular Christians, is as true of whole Churches; that *though they have all Faith, yet if they have not Charity they are nothing.*

I grant that no Charity teacheth men to see others Damned and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be consider'd, that the damning of men is a very hard thing, and therefore when ever we do it, the case must be wonderfully plain. And is it so in this case? They of the Church of *Rome* cannot deny, but that we imbrace all the doctrines of our Saviour and his Apostles; whatever is contain'd in the Apostles Creed, and determined by the four first general Councils; And yet they will not allow this, and a good life, to put us within a possibility of salvation, because we will not submit to all the innovasions they would impose upon us. And yet I think there is scarce any *Doctrine* or *Practice*, in difference between them and us, which some or other of their most learned Writers have not acknowledged, either not to be sufficiently contained in Scripture, or not to have been held and practised by the Primitive Church; so that nothing can excuse their uncharitableness towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this Argument; for they do what in them lies,

lies, to make themselves no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer Church; a *medium* which we do not desire to make use of.

2. If this Argument were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error, which another does not account damnable, what ever it be; provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it, and there wants nothing but *confidence* and *uncharitableness* to do this. But is there any sense, that another mans boldness and want of Charity should be an Argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful Physician and a Mountebanck. A *learned* and *skilful Physician* is modest, and speaks *justly* of things: he sayes that such a method of Cure which he hath directed is safe, and with all, that that which the Mountebank prescribes may possibly do the work; but there is great hazard and danger in it. But the *Mountebank* who never talks of any thing less than *Infallible Cures* (and always the more Mountebank, the stronger pretence to Infallibility) he is *positive* that that Method which the Physician prescribes will destroy the Patient, but his Receipt is Infallible, and never fails. Is there any reason in this case, that this man should carry it, meerly by his *confidence*? And yet if this Argument be good, the safest way is to reject the Physicians advice, and to stick to the Mountebanks; For both sides are agreed, that

there is a possibility of Cure in the Mountebanks method, but not in the Physicians; and so the whole force of the Argument lies in the *confidence* of an *ignorant man*.

4. This Argument is very unfit to work upon *those* to whom it is propounded: For either they believe we say true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reason to be moved by what we say. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we say in this matter? Namely, that though it be possible for some in the Communion of the *Roman* Church to be saved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a safe condition already in our Church; and why then should *a bare possibility*, accompani'd with infinite and apparent hazard, be an Argument to any man to run into that danger?

Lastly, This Argument is very improper to be urged by those who make use of it. Part of the strength of it lies in this, that we *Protestants* acknowledg that *it is possible a Papist may be saved*. But why should they lay any stress upon this? what matter is it, what we Hereticks say, who are so damnably mistaken in all other things? Methinks, if there were no other reason, yet because we say it, it should seem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive, when it serves for their purpose, we have some little Credit and Authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in some measure satisfied of the *weakness of this Argu-*

ment, which is so transparent, that no wise man can honestly use it, and he must have a very odd Understanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is *a casual and contingent Argument*, and sometimes it concludes right, and oftner wrong: and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one case; when all things are so equal on both sides, that there is nothing else in the whole World to determine him; which surely can never happen in matters of Religion necessarily to be believed. No man is so weak, as not to consider in the change of his religion, the *merits* of the *cause it self*; to examine the *Doctrines* and *Practises* of the Churches on both sides; to take notice of the *confidence* and *Charity* of both Parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conscientious and a prudent man. And if upon enquiry there appear to be a clear advantage on either side, then this Argument is needless, and comes too late, because the work is already done without it.

Besides that the great hazard of Salvation in the *Roman* Church, (which we declare upon account of the *Doctrines* and *Practises* which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that Religion, than the acknowledged possibility of Salvation in it, ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it: Never did any Christian Church

build

build so much hay and stubble upon the foun dation of Christianity; and therefore *those that are saved in it, must be saved*, as it were *out of the fire*. And though *Purgatory* be not meant in the Text, yet it is a doctrine very well suited to their manner of building; for there is need of an *Ignis purgatorius*, of a fire to try their work, what it is, and to burn up their hay and stubble. And I have so much charity (and I desire alwaies to have it) as to hope that a great many among them who live piously, and have been almost inevitably detain'd in that Church by the prejudice of Education and an invincible ignorance, will upon a *general repentance* find mercy with God, and though their work suffer loss and be burnt yet *they themselves may escape as out of the fire*. But as for those who have had the opportunities of coming to the knowledg of the truth, if they continue in the Errors of that Church, or Apostatize from the truth. I think their condition so far from being safe, that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case to give a man hopes of their Salvation.

I have now done with two things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the *necessary defence* of our Religion, against the *restless importunities* and *attempts* of its Adversaries upon all sorts of Persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dis-

pute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witneſſes, that I have conſtantly made it my buſineſs, in this great preſence and aſſembly, to plead againſt the *impieties* and *wickedneſs* of men; and have endeavour'd, by the beſt Arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a *firm belief* and *ſerious practice* of the main things of religion. And, I do aſſure you, I had much rather perſwade any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Chriſtians whatſoever. For I doubt not but *the belief of the Antient Creed*, without the addition of any other Articles, *together with a good life*, *will certainly ſave a man*; and without this no man can have reaſonable hopes of ſalvation, no not in an Infallible Church, if there were any ſuch to be found in the World.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent obſerver of the *Genius* and Humour of the ſeveral ſects and profeſſions in religion. And upon the whole matter, I do in my conſcience believe the Church of *England* to be the beſt conſtituted Church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the *Doctrine*, and *Government*, and *Worſhip* of it are excellently framed to make men *ſoberly religious*: ſecuring men on the one hand from the wild freaks of *Enthuſiaſm*; and on the other, from the groſs follies of *Superſtition*. And our Church hath this peculiar advantage above

bove ſeveral profeſſions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and juſt ſubordination to the *civil authority*, and hath alwayes been untainted in *its loyalty*.

And now ſhall every trifling conſideration be ſufficient to move a man to relinquiſh ſuch a Church? There is no greater diſparagement to a mans Underſtanding, no greater Argument of a light and ungenerous Mind, than raſhly to change ones Religion. *Religion* is our greateſt concernment of all other, and it is not every *little Argument*, no nor a great noiſe about *Infallibility*, nothing but very *plain* and *convincing evidence*, that ſhould ſway a man in this caſe. But they are utterly inexcuſable, who make a change of ſuch concernment upon the inſinuations of one ſide only, without ever hearing what can be ſaid for the Church they were Baptized and brought up in, before they leave it. They that can yield thus eaſily to the Impreſſions of every one that hath a deſign and intereſt to make *Proſelytes*, may at this rate of diſcretion change their *Religion* twice a-day, and inſtead of *Morning* and *Evening Prayer* they may have a *Morning* and an *Evening Religion*.

Therefore, for Gods ſake, and for our own Souls ſake, and for the ſake of our Reputation, let us conſider and *ſhew our ſelves men*; Let us not ſuffer our ſelves to be ſhaken and carried away with every wind; Let us not run our ſelves into danger when we may be ſafe. Let us ſtick to the *Foundation* and *Religion*, the *Articles* of our *Common belief*, and Build upon them Gold, and Silver, and precious Stones, I mean, the *virtues and actions of a good Life*; and if we would do this we ſhould not be apt to ſet ſuch a value upon *Hay* and *Stubble*. If we would ſincerely

endea-

endeavour, to live *holy and vertuous lives*, we ſhould not need to caſt about for a *Religion* which may furniſh us with eaſie and indirect wayes to get to Heaven.

I WILL conclude all with the Apoſtles Exhortation. *Wherefore my beloved Brethren, be ye ſteadfaſt and unmoveable, alwayes abounding in the work of the Lord.*

NOW the God of peace which brought again from the Dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, *the great Shepherd of the Sheep, by the blood of the Everlaſting Covenant make you perfect in every good work to do his will; working in you that which is well pleaſing in his ſight, through* Jeſus Chriſt, *to whom be Glory for ever and ever,* Amen.

The End.

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